

Media, PA – On Thursday, February 21, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA – 07) held the 7th Congressional District Religious/Community Anti-Violence Summit at Collenbrook United Church in Drexel Hill. The Congressman has been focused on the summit since he took office in January 2007, and has made frequent visits to churches, synagogues, mosques, and other local communities of faith to gather their opinions and counsel on issues of utmost importance, particularly local violence.

— “I fully recognize that violence and crime know no boundaries,” said Congressman Sestak, adding, “Over the past two years, Delaware County has seen a 37.5 percent increase in the number of aggravated assaults. We need the full force of our citizens, community organizations, religious leaders and elected officials as we seek pragmatic solutions to violence and its causes. Our communities have been working to address this violence but we can and we must do more.”

The summit featured panel discussions by local experts, law enforcement officers, religious and community leaders who discussed the role of violence in our community and how various interfaith and community organizations can partner with elected officials to reduce it. An agenda from the summit, including the names and affiliations of the expert panelists, follows this release.

Congressman Sestak said that during his many visits with communities of faith, he often noted that both government and religious communities have long sought solutions to alleviate social ills. He chose to host this particular summit because he wanted to help leverage what he and public agencies do with the efforts of interfaith and community groups.

Congressman Sestak recognizes that at the most basic level, we require laws and programs that protect victims, ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted, and address the root causes of criminal behavior. To that end, he has supported program and legislation such as the violence Against Women Act, the COPS Program and the U.S. Department of Justice's Weed and Seed program, which is currently operational in Upper Darby.

Congressman Sestak said that the root causes of crime range from lack of educational opportunities to joblessness, and noted that "crime flourishes in the absence of hope and opportunity." Therefore, he has fought in Congress to pass legislation that aims to foster a society where opportunities are available to all who seek them. For instance, he voted for the Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Bill that allowed him to secure \$150,000 for the Community Partnership for Job Readiness Program, which will provide workforce development services in the local municipalities of Trainer, Marcus Hook and Upper Darby. It also provides a \$43 million increase for Job Corps, a program that provides job training and placement for at-risk youth. The bill rejects the President's proposal to eliminate the vital \$630 million Community Development Block Grant, which local communities use to help low-income families get on their feet. On the education front, the legislation designates \$150,000 for Widener University's Early Childhood Engagement Project, which will be used to

improve access to and quality of programs for 3-4 year old children. And for those young adults with the most financial need, the bill addresses college affordability by raising the funding level of Pell Grants.

Agenda for 7th Congressional District Religious/Community Antiviolence Summit

5:30 Registration Begins

6:00 Opening Remarks – Congressman Sestak

6:10 Panel I: Broken Windows, Broken Spirits

Panelists:

Dr. Jon Pahl, Professor, The Lutheran Theological Seminary

Ms. Jessica R. Conley, Assistant District Attorney, Delaware County

Mr. Keith Arrington, Principal, Chester High School

Ms. Janine Kelly, Community Education Coordinator, The Women's Center of Montgomery County

Lt. David C. Peifer, Delaware County Criminal Investigation Division

Ms. Diane Edbril, Policy Director, Ceasefire PA

Chief Thomas Byrne, Ridley Park Police Department

6:45 Question and Answer Session

7:00 Panel II: The Way Ahead-Learning How to Live in Peace, Moderated by Congressman Sestak

Panelists:

Rabbi Mark Robbins, Congregation Ohev Shalom

Dr. Raymond Merriweather, First Baptist Church

Imam Muhammad `Abdur-Razzaq Miller, Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, Board Chair

Sr. Frances Murray, OSF, Ministry of Caring

Mr. Gurpreet Singh, Singh Sabha

Rabbi Peter Hyman, Temple Beth Shalom

7:40 Question and Answer Session